Laurie Wagman was born and raised in Philadelphia, where her parents made music a part of her and sister Flora's daily lives. Like her mother, Wagman sang, and her sister played the piano. Summer evenings growing up were spent at the Dell concerts and Wagman attended her first opera, Carmen, at age 10. These were the influences that guided Laurie Wagman to the theater arts—first, as a performer, then as a writer/composer, and ultimately as a producer.

In 1971, when Playhouse in the Park opened, Wagman formed American Theater Arts (ATA), a company to give Philadelphians a consistent, professional source for live theater for young people. ATA shows were so popular that Wagman and ATA were invited to produce an indoor series at the Walnut Street Theater during the cold winter months. After two successful years, Wagman began to set her sights beyond Philadelphia. She booked a full week of performances of Alice in Wonderland at Carnegie Hall, where she produced 12 sold-out performances.

Wagman’s success in New York gave her the confidence to expand nationally. ATA has grown to include American Family Theater plus Arts in Education, a program which creates workshops and residencies with school districts nationwide, linking theater arts with educational, cultural and community programs; and Reach for the Stars, a learning resource from ATA that provides free theater access to children with special needs.

Twenty nine years later, the company’s repertoire includes 44 original stage productions and tours 26 shows which are presented annually to more than 1.6 million young people in more than 500 cities nationwide. ATA currently employs more than 300 professional actors and technical personnel, and books more than 10,000 hotel rooms each year.

Despite their national presence, Wagman and ATA continue to call Philadelphia home. Wagman is committed to Philadelphia, which she claims is the “best city in the world because you can throw a pebble in the water and make a ripple—you can change people’s lives.” Her commitment to children’s theater is stronger than ever, for she is, in her own words: “an educator who just happens to be a producer. The fact is that theater is one of the most powerful educational tools of all. It is the cornerstone of civilization.”

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Wagman lives in Philadelphia with her husband, where she enjoys spending time with her children and grandchildren. She is Vice Chairman of the Opera Company of Philadelphia, and writes poetry and music. She has also written the book, music and lyrics for nine productions for children.

For her commitment and achievements on behalf of young people, Wagman has received many awards, including citations from the City of Philadelphia and the Freedom's Foundation.

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Laurie Wagman

Laurie Wagman and her family have a long and fulfilling history with Temple Beth Zion-Beth Israel. Laurie’s mother, Leah Lyman, was a longtime member of Beth Zion-Beth Israel, and Laurie and her husband, Irv Borowsky, were members of the Neziner Synagogue. Laurie fondly recalls the merger of the Neziner Synagogue with Beth Zion-Beth Israel making Laurie and her mother members of the same synagogue where they enjoyed sitting together in services for many years.

The dedication of the Laurie Wagman Playschool brings parts of Laurie’s life full circle. The Neziner ark in the playschool area is a beautiful reminder of Laurie’s entrance into the Temple Beth Zion-Beth Israel family. Now this historic piece of ritual architecture juxtaposed with joyful, playing toddlers becomes a perfectly apt image of what Jewish life means to Laurie.

Laurie’s fondness for very young children and her love of theater have always been central to her life. When her own children were small, Laurie started her own playschool which grew over the years. In time, she combined her experiences in early childhood education with her love of writing, directing, and performing for children to found American Theater Arts for Youth, Inc. (TAFY), a national educational organization that presents professional theater to students as an extension of classroom curriculum. For over three decades, youth nationwide have benefited from her contribution to education.

Through American TAFY, Laurie has provided the programs and services, the vision and inspiration that link theater with educational processes. Today, American TAFY is the leading organization of its kind in the nation, and Laurie has made a unique cultural contribution throughout the United States in having commissioned and produced 44 original stage musicals, which now play in over 428 cities. All productions are presented in the major theaters/performing arts facilities in each city.

In Philadelphia, her productions are performed at the Kimmel Center where our BZBI preschoolers are often part of the captivated audience. Last year alone, over 1.2 million students came to her productions that embody a solid tradition of theater arts in education for all grade levels. “Bringing the gift of theater arts to school children is one of the highest goals of American theater Arts For Youth,” Laurie notes. “As the nation’s prime presenter of quality theater for students, we have brought curriculum-related programs to every corner of America. In the year ahead, as we celebrate the 35th anniversary of our founding, we renew our commitment to these goals.”

With extensive work in both theater and film, and the development of American Theater Arts for Youth into one of the country’s most widely acclaimed performance organizations directing efforts to young audiences, Laurie Wagman is acknowledged by both educators and the media as a national authority in the field of curriculum-related theater. The New York Times wrote, “Wagman perfectly understands what theater for children is all about…the excitement, the magic and, most of all, the learning experience inherent in live performance.”

Laurie pioneered the use of the arts to augment classroom learning when she established American TAFY in 1970 to meet the cultural enrichment needs of students and the curricular needs of teachers. She has been, in addition, instrumental in the recognition and presentation of film as a vital educational medium.
In 2000, President Bill Clinton noted, "Laurie Wagman has brought quality theater to every corner of America. She has made a home for theater arts in the heart of every young person who comes and enjoys and learns from her programs throughout the nation. I applaud American Theater Arts for Youth for making theater arts an integral part of American education."

Laurie has been the recipient of numerous awards for her achievements on behalf of young people, including citations from the City of Philadelphia and the Freedoms Foundation. In addition to maintaining a full professional schedule, Laurie makes time for volunteer activities that are rooted in the arts. She serves on the Boards of the Opera Company of Philadelphia, the Creative Glass Center of America and the National Theater Alliance.

The Temple Beth Zion-Beth Israel family is grateful to Laurie for her generosity and the beautiful spirit she brings along with her philanthropy. Clearly, her love of little ones shines through when she walks through our BZBI playschool classrooms. She notes, "When you have the opportunity to be with little children, you have a chance to live life many times over. Through their eyes, you discover the world anew."

Our Laurie Wagman Playschool is meeting the growing needs of our early childhood community with experiences that enrich, educate and enchant. Thank you, Laurie Wagman!
Laurie Wagman is the Founder/CEO of American Theater Arts for Youth, Inc. (TAFY) and its division, American Family Theater (AFT), the educational organizations that present professional theater to school students as an extension of classroom curriculum.

For over two decades, youth nationwide have benefited from her contribution to education.

Through TAFY and AFT, Ms. Wagman has provided the programs and services, the vision and inspiration that link theater with educational processes. Today, TAFY is the largest and oldest organization of its kind in the nation and Laurie Wagman has achieved a unique theatrical level in having commissioned and produced 42 original stage musicals which now play in over 458 cities throughout the United States and Canada. All productions are presented in the major theater/Performing arts facility in each city.

Last year alone, over 1.7 million students came to her productions that embody a solid tradition of theater arts in education for all grade levels. “Bringing the gift of theater arts to schools is one of the highest goals of American Theater Arts for Youth,” notes Ms. Wagman. “As the nation’s prime presenter of quality theater for students, we have brought curriculum-related programs to every corner of America. In the year ahead, as we celebrate the 29th anniversary of our founding, we renew our commitment to these goals.”

In 1998, TAFY will produce, rehearse and send out 26 tours from Philadelphia utilizing the services, skills, and talents of over 300 people. Currently in pre-production are four of her newest projects:

- “Pippi Longstocking” a musical based on the famous story by Astrid Lungren.
- “Wind in the Willows” based on the classroom classic by Kenneth Grahame.
- “Great American Classics – On Stage” written and developed specifically for junior and senior high students, features six great authors in one production.
- “Alice in Wonderland” a musical adaptation of the timeless favorite by Lewis Carroll.

Ms. Wagman has been the recipient of numerous awards for her achievements on behalf of young people including citations from the City of Philadelphia and the Freedoms Foundation. In addition to maintaining a full professional schedule, Laurie Wagman makes time for volunteer activities that are rooted in the arts. She is Vice Chairman of the Opera Company of Philadelphia and serves on the Boards of Trustees of the American Museum, the Liberty Museum, the Creative Glass Center of America and the American Interfaith Institute.
Laurie Wagman

Laurie Wagman is the Founder/President of American Theater Arts For Youth, Inc. (TAFY) and its divisions, American Family Theater (AFT) and Educational Theater Arts (ETA), the educational organizations that presents professional theater to school students as an extension of classroom curriculum.

For over three decades, youth nationwide have benefited from her contribution to education.

Through TAFY and its divisions, Ms. Wagman has provided the programs and services, the vision and inspiration that link theater with educational processes. Today, TAFY is the largest and oldest organization of its kind in the nation and Laurie Wagman has achieved a unique theatrical level in having commissioned and produced 42 original stage musicals which now play in over 458 cities throughout the United States and Canada. All productions are presented in the major theater/performing arts facility in each city.

Last year alone, over 1.7 million students came to her productions that embody a solid tradition of theater arts in education for all grade levels. "Bringing the gift of theater arts to schools is one of the highest goals of American Theater Arts For Youth," notes Ms. Wagman. "As the nation's prime presenter of quality theater for students, we have brought curriculum-related programs to every corner of America. In the year ahead, as we celebrate the 31st anniversary of our founding, we renew our commitment to these goals."

With extensive work in both theater and film, and the development of American Theater Arts For Youth into one of the country's most widely acclaimed cultural organizations directing efforts to young audiences, Laurie Wagman is acknowledged by both educators and the media as a national authority in the field of curriculum-related theater. The New York Times wrote, "Wagman perfectly understands what theater for children is all about... the excitement, the magic and, most of all, the learning experience inherent in live performance."

Ms. Wagman pioneered the use of the arts to augment classroom learning when she established TAFY in 1970 to meet the cultural enrichment needs
of students and the curricular needs of teachers. She has been, in addition, instrumental in the recognition and presentation of film as a vital educational medium.

From her production of WE THE PEOPLE which was developed under the auspices of the U.S. government for performances in 82 cities to IT’S UP TO ME which addresses at-risk issues for today’s students to ONCE I HAD AN OPERATION, a film designed in association with Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia to prepare youngsters for major surgery, Ms. Wagman’s interests and influence are broad-based.

In 2001, TAFY will produce, rehearse and send out 24 tours from Philadelphia utilizing the services, skills and talents of over 300 theater professionals. Currently in pre-production are four of her newest projects:

- “Pippi Longstocking” a musical based on the timeless favorite by Astrid Lungen.
- “Ellis Island-Gateway to a Dream” focusing on the courage and challenges of the immigration experience.
- “Great American Classics-On Stage” written and developed specifically for junior and senior high students, features six great authors in one production.
- “Anne Frank-A Voice Heard” a memorable musical based on the famous diary.

In 1996, President Bill Clinton noted, “Laurie Wagman has brought quality theater to every corner of America. Clearly, she has made a home for theater arts in the heart of every young person who has the opportunity to come and enjoy and learn from her programs throughout the nation. I applaud American Theater Arts For Youth for making theater arts an integral part of American education.”

Ms. Wagman has been the recipient of numerous awards for her achievements on behalf of young people including citations from the City of Philadelphia and the Freedoms Foundation. In addition to maintaining a full professional schedule, Laurie Wagman makes time for volunteer activities that are rooted in the arts. She is Vice Chairman of the Opera Company of Philadelphia and serves on the Boards of the African American Museum, the Creative Glass Center of America and the American Interfaith Institute.
"Laurie Wagman has brought quality theater to every corner of America"
................President Bill Clinton, 2000

Laurie Wagman

Laurie Wagman is the Founder/Chairman of American Theater Arts for Youth, Inc. (TAFY), the educational organization that presents professional theater to school students as an extension of classroom curriculum. For over four decades, youth nationwide have benefited from her contribution to education.

Through American TAFY, Ms. Wagman has provided the programs and services, the vision and inspiration that link theater with educational processes. Today, American TAFY is the leading organization of its kind in the nation, and Laurie Wagman has made a unique cultural contribution throughout the United States in having commissioned and produced 44 original stage musicals, which now play in over 300 cities. All productions are presented in the major theaters/performing arts facilities in each city.

Last year alone, over 600,000 students came to her productions that embody a solid tradition of theater arts in education for all grade levels. "Bringing the gift of theater arts to schools is one of the highest goals of American Theater Arts For Youth," notes Ms. Wagman. "As the nation’s prime presenter of quality theater for students, we have brought curriculum-related programs to every corner of America. In the year ahead, we will celebrate the 42nd anniversary of our founding by renewing our commitment to these goals."

With extensive work in both theater and film, and the development of American Theater Arts For Youth into one of the country’s most widely acclaimed performance organizations directing efforts to young audiences, she is acknowledged by both educators and the media as a national authority in the field of curriculum-related theater.
The New York Times wrote, "Laurie Wagman perfectly understands what theater for children is all about... the excitement, the magic and, most of all, the learning experience inherent in live performance."

Ms. Wagman pioneered the use of the arts to augment classroom learning when she established American TAFY in 1970 and, subsequently, American Family Theater, Inc. in 1974 to meet the cultural enrichment needs of students and the curricular needs of teachers. She has been, in addition, instrumental in the recognition and presentation of film as a vital educational medium.

In 2000, President Bill Clinton noted, "Laurie Wagman has brought quality theater to every corner of America. Clearly, she has made a home for theater arts in the heart of every young person who has the opportunity to come and enjoy and learn from her programs throughout the nation. I applaud American Theater Arts for Youth for making theater arts an integral part of American education."

Ms. Wagman has been the recipient of numerous awards for her achievements on behalf of young people, including citations from the City of Philadelphia and the Freedoms Foundation. In addition to maintaining a full professional schedule, Ms. Wagman makes time for volunteer activities that are rooted in the arts. She serves on the Boards of the Opera Company of Philadelphia, the Creative Glass Center of America and the National Theater Alliance.

A life-long resident of Philadelphia, Laurie Wagman lives with her husband, Irvin J. Borowsky, in Center City. Together their philanthropic focus reflects a broad base of influence, creativity and interests that embrace art, education and social services.